The Millennium in the Reformed Tradition

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Introduction

In the Reformed tradition there is no consensus concerning the nature of the millennium referred to in Revelation 20.[1] In fact, apart from one notable exception, one will find no references to the millennium in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed confessions. That exception is found in the Second Helvetic (Swiss) Confession written by Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor at the Grossmünster in Zurich. There we read:

> We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth. For evangelical truth in Matt., chs. 24 and 25, and Luke, ch. 18, and apostolic teaching in II Thess., ch. 2, and II Tim., chs. 3 and 4, present something quite different (Chapter XI).[2]

The author of the article "Chiliasmus" in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* even goes so far as to say that chiliasm,[3] i.e., millenarianism" is basically incompatible with the Catholic and Lutheran concept of the church and "was quickly and energetically rejected by the reformers."[4] This statement is extreme, for the only support given for it is the Augsburg Confession (*Confessio Augustana*), 17 and the reference above from the Second Helvetic Confession. Moreover, the sixteenth-century reformers generally ignored the issue.

However, it was not only the magisterial reformers and confessions which had little interest in a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth prior to the consummation of all things. The word "millennium" does not appear in most histories of doctrine or standard theologies by Reformed theologians. Notable exceptions are the Puritans, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck; and in the twentieth century the American Presbyterian theologians Loraine Boettner, Floyd Hamilton, and James Boice,[5] the Reformed Church in America theologian Albertus Pieters, and the Christian Reformed theologians D.H. Kromminga and William Hendriksen. The two most significant contemporary treatments of the various millennial views are G.C. Berkouwer's *The Return of Christ*, and Anthony Hoekema's *The Bible and the Future*. The most recent comprehensive treatment is *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options*, by the Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz.[6]

European Reformed theologians generally show little interest in the millennium. For example, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Otto Weber, T.F. Torrance, Hendrikus Berkhof, and Jürgen Moltmann deal with it only in passing, if at all. Karl Barth never got around to writing a volume on eschatology in his massive *Church Dogmatics* although he deals with eschatological motifs throughout the *Church Dogmatics* and elsewhere.[7] In the third volume of Emil Brunner's dogmatics, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation,*[8] there is no reference to chiliasm, the millennium, or Revelation 20. The other theologians mentioned here do little better.[9] By contrast, the millennium has been an American preoccupation in conservative circles since premillennialism and dispensationalism flourish here.

The Various Millennial Views[10]

Inasmuch as even theological students are ill-informed both about the three historic approaches to the millennium and the very different dispensational premillennial interpretation, it may be useful to define them before proceeding.

Amillennialism.

Amillennialists interpret the thousand years in Revelation 20:1-7 as a symbolic figure which refers to the period between Christ's first coming and his coming in glory. Having decisively defeated the powers of evil on the cross and having been vindicated by his resurrection from the dead, Christ rules by his Word and Spirit. The reign of God is being realized in history but the powers of evil continue to exist alongside the kingdom of God until Christ returns in glory and consummates the kingdom with the final judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth.

Amillennialists take seriously the so-called "signs of the times" in Matthew 24 (parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21), as well as the appearance of a personal Antichrist before Christ's return. However, they refuse to speculate when Christ will return because the earthly Jesus himself did not know the day or the hour (Mark 13:32).

Postmillennialism

In this view the thousand years is also not taken literally but does signify a more specific period, a sort of golden age which will precede Christ's return. The faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel will result in an unprecedented growth of the church, a Christianization of society with evil reduced to a minimum, and an extended period of universal peace. The prophecy in Romans 11:25-26 concerning a large-scale conversion of the Jews is another aspect of this millennial age. At the climax of this Christianized era (which may be longer than a thousand years), Christ will return in glory.

Historic Premillennialism

Premillennialists believe that after a great apostasy, the appearance of the Antichrist, and the great tribulation, Christ will return and reign with some of his followers for exactly one thousand years. There will be a great turning to Christ, Jews will be converted, the Antichrist slain, and evil will be held in check. However, toward the end of this millennium there will be a great rebellion of wicked people who will almost overwhelm the saints. Satan, who had been bound during the millennial reign of Christ and the saints, will be loosed and will gather the rebellious nations together for the battle of Gog and Magog. Ultimately Satan will be defeated and cast into the lake of fire. Then after the final resurrection and last judgment, a new earth purged of all evil will be established.[11]

Dispensational Millennialism

Although many people assume that all premillennialists are dispensationalists, there are enough differences to designate this as a distinct form of millennialism.[12] It is based on John Nelson Darby's (a Plymouth Brethren minister, 1800-1882) division of the history of salvation into several distinct dispensations whereby God deals differently with people during different eras. Popularized by C.I. Scofield and his Scofield Bible, Darby's view teaches a two-stage coming of Christ before the millennium: "the first, a secret rapture that removes the church before the Great Tribulation devastates the earth; the second, Christ's coming with his saints to set up the kingdom."[13] That kingdom will be centered in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem from which Christ will reign. Of major importance in dispensationalism is the fundamental and abiding distinction between Israel and the church. Throughout eternity there will be a distinction between redeemed Jews and redeemed Gentiles.[14]

A Brief Historical Overview

Although the focus of this essay is Reformed interpretations of the millennium, it will be instructive to sketch briefly the situation prior to the Reformation. Many of the early church fathers, including Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Hippolytus, were premillenarians. However, by the fourth century, the amillennial position began to dominate, a tendency reinforced by Augustine's shift from premillennialism to amillennialism. As a result, the Council of Ephesus (431) gave amillennialism official sanction and condemned as superstitious belief in a literal thousand year reign. Nevertheless, the premillennial view continued to be promoted by minority, charismatic figures who were unhappy with the establishment.[15]

As noted earlier, the sixteenth-century reformers were amillennial, partially, it appears, in reaction to radical Anabaptists' revolutionary activities and apocalyptic speculations about the end times. The situation quickly changed, however, in the seventeenth century. Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638), a

German Calvinist, revived the premillennial view in *The Beloved City*, a book which influenced Anglican Joseph Mede (1586-1638). Their visions of God's kingdom on earth inspired leaders of the Puritan revolution of the 1640s.

In the meantime, there was a popular revival of premillennialism among the Bohemian Brethren and some Reformed congregations in the Netherlands. This approach was furthered by Philipp Spener (1635-1705), the founder of German Pietism. Although Spener was a Lutheran, his influence spread beyond denominational boundaries.

Thus the seventeenth century, although dominated by Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy, was also an era in which premillennialism flourished, particularly among English Puritans and German Pietists. By the following century this interest in an earthly kingdom waned under the impact of liberalism and secular evolutionary thinking.[16] It is precisely during this optimistic time that postmillennialism became popular in Presbyterian circles. One of the earliest theologians to promote this view was Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), an Anglican who was both anti-Roman Catholic and anti-Calvinist. His postmillennial views were adopted by many ministers in England in the eighteenth century and by the neo-Calvinist Jonathan Edwards in the United States.

Although postmillennialism continued as a significant force in the nineteenth-century Presbyterian circles of Charles and A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield, this is also the period when dispensational premillennialism rose to significance. Its founder, Darby, was succeeded by such ministers and authors as G. Campbell Morgan, H.A. Ironside, A.C. Gaebelin and Scofield. These men had tremendous influence in evangelical circles on both sides of the Atlantic.

Edward Irving, a Church of Scotland minister, was also influential during this period. He published many works on prophecy and helped to found the Alburg Park prophecy conference which "set the pattern for millennial gatherings throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."[17] Although not a dispensationalist, Irving was influenced by Darby.

In the twentieth century, historic premillennialism and dispensational millennialism command the largest popular audiences. A leading representative of the former is the late George Eldon Ladd, long-time professor of New Testament at Fuller Seminary.[18] The best-known author of the latter is Hal Lindsey whose *The Late Great Planet Earth,*[19] and *There's a New World Coming,*[20] (both available in supermarkets), have been best sellers. In addition, films like "The Thief in the Night," a dispensationalist version of the rapture, continue to be shown on network TV. Even more influential is the prominence of millennialism in the mass media. Not only are the majority of TV evangelists premillennial, but most Bible schools in North America are dispensational, and like Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, have a tremendous influence through their popular radio broadcasts.

Key Reformed Representatives

With this background we are in a position to examine the treatment of the millennium by representative Reformed theologians.

The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Calvin

None of the major sixteenth-century reformers appears to have wrestled seriously with the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-7. It may be that like Luther and Calvin, Zwingli, Bullinger, Bucer, and John Knox shied away from anything that looked like apocalyptic speculation[21] because of the association of Thomas Münzer and certain Anabaptist radicals with premillennial type views. They may also have been influenced by Augustine's adoption of amillennialism.[22]

In any case, Calvin expressed his strong antipathy toward millennial thinking in the *Institutes*:

> Now their [the chiliasts'] fiction is too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation. And the Apocalypse, from which they undoubtedly drew a pretext for their error, does not support them. For the number "one thousand" [Rev. 20:4] does not apply to the eternal blessedness of the church but only to the various disturbances that awaited the church, while still toiling on earth. On the contrary, all Scripture proclaims that there will be no end to the blessedness of the elect or the punishment of the wicked [Matt. 25:41, 46] (III.25.5).[23]

One should not conclude from this that Calvin had no interest in eschatology. His was an "eschatology of hope."[24] Whereas Luther focused on the cross of Christ, Calvin goes on to point out the significance of Christ's resurrection for the faith of the believer: "For as he [Christ], in rising again, came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone" (*Inst.* II.16.13). For Calvin, an important aspect of the Christian life is a meditation on the future life.[25] For him, meditation, not speculation, is the proper approach to the future.

The Puritans

Despite Calvin's antipathy to millennialism, some English Puritans, who represent a type of Calvinism, were leaning toward premillennialism even before Calvin's death.[26] Some of this millennial interest was sparked by a different interpretation of Romans 11. Neither Calvin nor Luther understood this chapter to promise a future wholesale conversion of the Jews. However, Bucer and Peter Martyr (both close to Calvin), and Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor), all taught that the nation of the Jews would be "joined to the church of Christ" prior to the end. Since Bucer taught at Cambridge and Martyr at Oxford, their influence was considerable. Moreover, Martyr's commentary on Romans

published in London in 1568 "prepared the way for a general adoption amongst the English Puritans of a belief in the future conversion of the Jews."[27]

The result was another step toward premillennialism, for soon English Puritans were producing books about prophecy (especially on Daniel), and commentaries on Revelation. This development culminated in 1627 with John Henry Alsted's *The Beloved City,* which identified the conversion of the Jews with the millennium in Revelation 20. This view soon became popular in England through the writings of Joseph Mede (1586-1638), a lecturer at Cambridge who explicitly referred to a premillennial coming of Christ.[28]

It is difficult, however, to discern the extent to which mainline English Puritans adopted premillennialism. In George Kroeze's survey of the period's literature the consensus seems to be that belief in an earthly millennial rule of Christ was being held by representatives of Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Independents. Moreover, there was broad acceptance of millenarianism over against an earlier view that it was mostly confined to such heterodox groups as the Ranters and Fifth Monarchists.[29]

Iain Murray, however, points to several leading Puritans who rejected a millenarian understanding of Revelation 20. Independents Thomas Hall and John Owen, and Presbyterians such as Thomas Manton and Samuel Rutherford tended toward a post-millennial view[30] that was very critical of the premillennial approach.

Consequently, one must be cautious in evaluating the nature of eschatological thinking in the latter half of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century in England. Although Kroeze finally concludes that "there were two distinct ways in which English reformers in the seventeenth century looked for the fulfillment of the millennium, i.e., between pre and post millennial strains,"[31] it is apparent that there are numerous variations within the two views.

The Eighteenth Century

Jonathan Edwards

Moving quickly to Jonathan Edwards and the eighteenth century does not mean that the only seventeenth-century Reformed theologians who dealt with the millennial question were the German J.H. Alsted and certain English Puritans.[32] However, in eighteenth-century colonial North America the figure of Jonathan Edwards towers above the rest. Prior to Edwards' arrival on the scene, ministers of Congregational background such as John Cotton (Boston), John Davenport, and Thomas Shepherd (Cambridge), emphasized an "inchoate millennium" or "Middle Advent." This meant that Christ's first return would be "a spiritual appearance to call Jews and Gentiles in their final ingathering before the destruction of the Antichrist; the other a literal, corporeal appearance of Christ to judge the world at the end of the one thousand year reign."[33]

However, toward the end of the seventeenth century we must take note of Increase Mather and his son Cotton Mather. Originally both were preterists, i.e.,

they believed in the contemporary-historical view of events in Revelation. Later, Cotton Mather taught that Christ would appear at the beginning and end of the millennium; that the first and second resurrection (see Rev. 20:5-6)[34] are both literal and corporeal; and that the raised saints of the first resurrection will rule in a literal heavenly New Jerusalem which hovers over the restored Jerusalem on the near earth.[35] Mather, like many modern dispensationalists made specific predictions based on a literal interpretation of various prophecies, and, like many moderns, often had to retract some of them.

Jonathan Edwards, representive of the next generation, is a full-blown postmillennialist. This type of thinking was already present in nascent form among some of the seventeenth-century English Puritans. Unlike Calvin, who shied away from Revelation, Edwards was fascinated by it. It is the only biblical book on which he wrote a separate commentary. His *Notes on the Apocalypse* (1723), was somehow lost for more than two centuries, but is now available in the scholarly edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.[36] Not only did he jot down his private reflections on Revelation, but sixty-six sermons on it remain among his papers.

Edwards was influenced by the apocalyptic tradition that had developed in the post-Reformation period described above. On the one hand he followed the Augustinian approaches of people like Brightman, Alsted, and Mather who understood the first resurrection as a spiritual conversion of individuals. On the other hand, he was intrigued by Moses Lowman's *Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation of St. John* (1737). Lowman conjectured that the Antichrist's 1,260 year reign would terminate in 2016. Edwards, however, preferred the chronology of Joseph Mede who expected the fall of the Antichrist either in 1716 or 1736.

In his *Notes on the Apocalypse*, based on Revelation 13 and 20, Edwards conjectured that the Antichrist's reign began in 606 and would therefore "end about 1866." However, Edwards also believed that this would not happen all at once. Rather, "he kept supernatural explanations to a minimum, stressing Antichrist's gradual decline over a long period of time, rather than resorting to a miraculous intervention of God."[37]

More positively, Edwards' millennial vision had two foci. First, he "found scriptural warrant for placing the land of Canaan at the center of the coming kingdom of Christ."[38] He was confident that "the most glorious part of the church will hereafter be there, at the center of the Kingdom of Christ, communicating influences to all other parts."[39] All this was contingent upon the return of the Jews to their homeland and their massive conversion to Christianity.

Second, in his later *Notes*, and in what Stephen Stein regards as an unguarded comment concerning which Edwards was quite defensive, he wrote:

> 'Tis not unlikely that this work of God's Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in

> Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind. If we consider how long since the things foretold, as what should precede this great event, have been accomplished; and how long this event has been expected by the church of God, and thought to be nigh by the most eminent men of God in the church; and withal consider what the state of things now is, and has for a considerable time been, in the church of God and world of mankind, we can't reasonably think otherwise, than that the beginning of this great work of God must be near. And there are many things that make it probable that this work will begin in America.[40]

This was written in the flush of enthusiasm of the Great Awakening following the visit of George Whitefield to Northampton in 1740 and of Edwards' own success as a revivalist in 1741-2. Stein submits, "This heady proclamation published in 1743 was neither in character with Edwards' earlier pronouncements on the revivals nor totally consistent with his own private reflections."[41] However, Calvin Seminary's John Bolt, lecturing on Edwards and Kuyper and "The Millennial Promise of the New World," points out that the same idea is in a sermon on 2 Chronicles 23:16 and in a later sermon on 1 Kings 8:44ff in 1745, i.e., that in America, and perhaps even in New England, they might be experiencing a foretaste of the millennial age.[42]

Whatever the location, the earthly millennium (prior to Christ's return; hence postmillennial) was to be marked by universal peace and love. This millennial period would be "a time of great temporal prosperity," improvement of health, ease, material wealth, and "great increase in children" as each and every one "shall build houses and inhabit them."[43]

Edwards' vision was shared by some of his contemporaries and followers, but with good reason he has been called "the father of American postmillennialism."[44] For although "millenarian ideas were integral to the early Colonial world view, it was the Great Awakening of the 1740s that etched a type of millennialism on the Colonial soul."[45]

The Nineteenth Century and Postmillennialism

It is a curious irony that the very centuries marked by the Enlightenment—the Age of Reason—and the flowering of theological liberalism are also the centuries in which postmillennialism was the preferred option for many leading American Presbyterian theologians. It could be argued that an optimistic view of history and the notion of the inevitability of progress go hand in hand with an optimistic millennial view. Moreover, during the nineteenth century the American spirit also "became saturated with a secularized postmillennialism."[46] In the early and mid-nineteenth century, however, postmillennialism and evangelical missionary zeal went hand in hand. But long before such Old School Princeton divines as Charles Hodge appeared on the scene, John Henry

Livingston (1746-1825), the "Father of the Reformed Church" and founder of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, was promoting the world mission cause in conjunction with his postmillennial outlook. In a sermon, "The Everlasting Gospel," based on Revelation 14:6-7, Livingston interpreted this "prophecy" to speak of a time when a zealous ministry would arise in the churches "with a new and extraordinary spirit . . . and be a prelude to momentous changes in the Church and in the world."[47] Livingston was also bold enough to predict this glorious millennial age would occur sometime between the Reformation and the fall of "Great Babylon . . . the Antichrist," the Pope. Since he dated the latter in 1999, he believed the millennial age would begin in the year 2000.[48]

The discordant note in this reasoning, however, is that most of the nineteenth- century Presbyterian proponents of postmillennialism were staunch, conservative Calvinists who believed in original sin and total depravity: At Princeton Seminary, Charles Hodge (1797-1878), his son and successor at Princeton, A.A. Hodge, and B.B. Warfield (1851-1921); and at Union Seminary in New York, W.G.T. Shedd (whose *Dogmatic Theology*[49] was a standard text for many years in Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries) were all postmillennialists. Despite their formal theologies, however, one wonders whether their theological outlook was not influenced by the optimism of that era.[50]

The final quarter of the nineteenth century marks a turning point. By then, neo-Calvinists (if one can include Geerhardus Vos [1862-1949]), the two great Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), were all amillenialists. At the same time it should be noted that postmillennialism has had its defenders in the twentieth century. Loraine Boettner[51] and J. Marcellus Kik[52] were two of its earliest adherents, while its contemporary representatives tend to be conservative Presbyterian scholars such as Norman Shepherd[53] of Westminster Seminary and John Jefferson Davis[54] of Gordon Conwell Seminary.

However, except for a recent development within the postmillennial camp, viz., the group known as the theononists or reconstructionists,[55] the best known postmillennial Reformed theologians are the two foremost Princeton divines of the nineteenth century, Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield.

Charles Hodge

The fact that Charles Hodge was the most revered and influential of the Princeton divines was recognized at a symposium there, October 22-24, 1997, convened to celebrate the 200th anniversary of his birthday.[56] On that occasion, Mark Noll pointed out that Hodge "did a better job than anyone else in the English-speaking world at the difficult task of both conserving traditional Calvinism and speaking it into a largely anti-Calvinist intellectual climate."[57] However, that neither Noll nor the other eight lecturers dealt with Hodge's eschatology demonstrates the current lack of interest in eschatological themes by most Presbyterian and Reformed historians and theologians.

Granted, unlike Jonathan Edwards or Abraham Kuyper, Hodge had no special interest either in the Book of Revelation or in speculation about the nature of the end time. In his semi-popular book, *The Way of Life* (American Sunday School Union,1906), he concludes with a chapter on "Holy Living," but there is nothing of Calvin's "meditation on the future life."[58] However, Part IV of the final volume of his *Systematic Theology* (1873) spells out his postmillennial eschatology.

Hodge begins his chapter on the second advent of Christ, with "the true design of prophecy," observing that "It is not intended to give us a knowledge of the future, analogous to that which history gives us of the past."[59] Here he surely has in mind premillennial types who "give detailed expositions" of certain prophets and Revelation in relation to the future. One such was William Miller who in 1818 predicted that Christ would return sometime between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. What Hodge wrote about such speculation should be written large in our time. Although they have been proven wrong again and again, he says, "this does not discourage a certain class of minds, for whom the future has a fascination and who delight in the solution of enigmas, from renewing the attempt."[60]

Hodge then outlines briefly what he calls "the common church doctrine" of Christ's second advent, and in the process makes evident his postmillennial leanings. Of the four events he says will take place before our Lord's return, the first and second are relevant here:

1. The universal diffusion of the Gospel; or, as our Lord expresses it, the ingathering of the elect; this is the vocation of the Christian Church.

2. The conversion of the Jews, which is to be national. As their casting away was national, although a remnant was saved; so their conversion may be national, although some may remain obdurate.[61]

The next chapters discuss the nature of the resurrection body, the second advent of Christ, the calling of the Gentiles and the conversion of the Jews, the Antichrist,[62] the general resurrection, the final judgment, the end of the world, and the nature of the heavenly kingdom.

> Prophecy sheds a sufficiently clear light on the future to teach us that this alternation ["times of depression and seasons of exaltation and prosperity"] . . . is to continue to the end, but, more definitely, that before the second coming of Christ there is to be a time of great and long continued prosperity, to be followed by a season of decay and of suffering, so that when the Son of Man comes he shall hardly find faith on the earth.

To this point one might conclude that he was a- or premillennial, but without explanation he proceeds to statements of a different sort:

> It appears from passages already quoted that all nations are to be converted; that the Jews are to be brought in and reingrafted into their own olive-tree; and that their restoration is to be the occasion and the cause of a change from death unto life; that is, analogous to the change of a body mouldering in the grave to one instinct with joyous activity and power. Of this period the ancient prophets speak in terms adapted to raise the hopes of the Church to the highest pitch. It is true it is difficult to separate, in their descriptions, what refers to "this latter day of glory" from what relates to the kingdom of Christ as consummated in heaven. So also it was difficult for the ancient people of God to separate what, in the declarations of their prophets, referred to the redemption of the people from Babylon from what referred to the greater redemption to be effected by the Messiah. In both cases enough is plain to satisfy the Church. There was a redemption from Babylon, and there was a redemption by Christ; and in like manner, it is hoped, there is to be a period of millennial glory on earth, and a still more glorious consummation of the Church in heaven. This period is called a millennium because in Revelation it is said to last a thousand years. . . . During this period, be it longer or shorter, the Church is to enjoy a season of peace, purity, and blessedness such as it has never yet experienced.[63]

Without ever using the term postmillennial, Hodge makes only an indirect allusion to "a millennial era" (not a precise thousand years) in which there will be "universal righteousness and peace on earth."[64] He also appears to agree with a Dr. Mc Neile "that this is the final dispensation, and that by a more copious outpouring of the Holy Spirit it will magnify itself, and swell into a universal blessedness predicted by the prophets, carrying with it Jews and Gentiles, even the whole world, in one glorious flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ the Lord."[65]

B.B. Warfield

Much the same view is expressed by the illustrious B.B. Warfield who, though professor of didactic and polemic theology at Princeton Seminary, was more exegetical in his approach to theology. Although the millennium was not a major concern of his, he contributed a significant essay on "The Millennium and the Apocalypse" to *The Princeton Theological Review* in 1904.

Warfield begins on a cautionary note which at the same time throws down the gauntlet. "Nothing," he says, "seems to have been more common in all ages of the Church than to frame an eschatological scheme from this passage [Rev. 20:1-7], imperfectly understood, and then to impose this scheme on the rest of Scripture *vi et armis*" [lit. with power and arms].[66] Then follows an analysis of Revelation 20:1-7, prefaced by the hermeneutical principles that should govern

its integration. In this context he makes an observation of eminent sense: "The ascertainment of the meaning of the Apocalypse is a task . . . not directly of verbal criticism but of sympathetic imagination: the teaching of the book lies not immediately in its words, but in the wide vistas its visions open to the fancy." In other words, what is particularly needed in interpreting Revelation is a "seeing eye" more than "the nice scales of linguistic science."[67] Such an approach will not appeal to literalistic premillennial interpreters, but it does commend itself to those who see in this book a drama rich with symbols rather than a historical roadmap with minute predictions.

Warfield also employs the principle of recapitulation which, he believes, governs Revelation's structure. This Augustinian approach was also utilized by seventeenth-century Reformed theologians. It discerns in each of the seven sections of Revelation a "successive portraiture" which develops and builds upon its predecessor. Revelation 20:1-10 is thus a symbolic description of the intermediate state in which the glorified saints enjoy a blessed existence with their Lord between his two advents.

In detailed exegesis of key passages in Revelation 20 and 21, Warfield often points out that Revelation does not differ essentially from the visions of the future in the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul. When Warfield offers his understanding of the events to precede Christ's final advent, however, he speaks of a future "golden age" that must be understood spiritually.

In one paragraph, and without naming it, he states the postmillennial view succinctly and eloquently. It is offered, without defense, as the clear teaching of Scripture:

> . . . a progressively advancing conquest of the earth by Christ's Gospel implies a coming age deserving at least the relative name of "golden." Perhaps a distinction may be made between a converted earth and a sanctified earth: such a distinction seems certainly more accordant with the tone of these visions than that more commonly suggested between a witnessed-to earth and a converted earth. The Gospel assuredly must be preached to the whole world as a witness, before the Lord comes. These visions seem to go farther and to teach that the earth—the whole world—must be won to Christ before He comes: and that it is precisely this conquest of it that He is accomplishing during the progress of this inter-adventual period.[68]

This description is so similar to Hodge that it might be called the classic nineteenth-century postmillennial view. Warfield's relatively brief essay lacks only the missionary zeal that accompanied Hodge's millennial outlook.[69]

The Transition

Unfortunately, the influential postmillennialism of the Old School Princeton divines was by the end of the century often transmuted into secular versions and liberal views of the kingdom of God.[70] As noted above, the few postmillennial theologians in conservative Presbyterian circles today are on the fringe of the Reformed theological enterprise whether conservative evangelical or mainline. A *Christianity Today* Institute survey conducted in the mid-1980s suggested that about nine percent of its readers held the postmillennial view.[71]

R.L. Dabney

Even in Hodge's day some major Presbyterian theologians preferred the amillennial approach. R.L. Dabney, Hodge's contemporary and counterpart in the Presbyterian U.S. (Southern) Church, a scholar and teacher of no small ability and influence,[72] was an amillennialist. His views were widely disseminated in his *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878), reprinted in a new edition in 1972 and 1985. Dabney's discussion of the millennium and Christ's second advent is so brief that he is quite indistinguishable from Hodge and Warfield except at two points: More than they, he takes his cues from "the wisdom and modesty" of the Westminster Assembly,[73] and unlike their style, his critique of the premillennialists is very sharp. He concedes that there are among them "some spiritually minded men," but basically is convinced that "the temper which secretly prompts this scheme is one of unbelief."[74]

Geerhardus Vos

It is very significant that Geerhardus Vos, who taught biblical theology at Princeton for forty years beginning in 1893, was the first major Princeton Seminary professor to reject the postmillennialism which had dominated there for much of the nineteenth century. As conservative as Hodge and Warfield, he was more biblical in his approach. Both his *Pauline Eschatology*[75] and *The Kingdom and the Church,* take up our issue.[76] In the former book Vos challenges the premillennial exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:24, and in the latter he criticizes both the liberal view of the kingdom and dispensationalism. He comes the closest to an explicit criticism of premillennialism in the chapter on "The Man of Sin" in his *Pauline Eschatology*:

> The idea of the Antichrist in general and that of the apostasy in particular ought to warn us, although this may not have been the proximate purpose of Paul, not to take for granted an uninterrupted progress of the cause of Christ through all ages on toward the end. As the reign of the truth will be gradually extended, so the power of evil will gather force towards the end. The making all things right and new in the world depend not on gradual amelioration but on the final interposition of God.[77]

In the meantime, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck were writing extensively on eschatological themes and steering a middle course between premillennialism and postmillennialism.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

The ministries of Kuyper and B.B. Warfield overlapped. They had a cordial relationship, as did Hodge and Dabney, but they differed on the interpretation of the millennium. In a 1988 lecture given at Calvin Seminary,[78] John Bolt compares Kuyper's vision of the millennial promise for the New World with that of Jonathan Edwards. Both—at least at one time in their respective careers—had great hopes for America as the new locus for the kingdom of God on earth. Whereas Edwards was encouraged to think along these lines because of the Great Awakening, Kuyper's visit to the United States over a century later moved him to make some amazing statements about America's place in the divine scheme of things. Addressing 2,300 people in Grand Rapids, October 26, 1898, he boldly declared: "America is destined in the providence of God to become the most glorious and noble nation the world has ever seen. Some day its renown will eclipse the renown and splendor of Rome, Greece and the old races."[79]

Yet, for all of his optimism about the future, Kuyper was not a postmillenialist. Like Edwards, he was fascinated by the Book of Revelation but, unlike Edwards, he did not anticipate a millennial golden age prior to Christ's return. In his meditations on Revelation,[80] however, he was carried away at times and came close to making historicist-type predictions:

> He who accepts that prophecy can not deny that in recent years whole series of phenomena have presented themselves which exactly square with what the Apocalypse foretells; and especially since the world war positive indications are abroad that apocalyptic predictions, whose fulfillment almost no one expected, have now surprisingly and almost literally materialized, and the question is whether the Consummation is not already close at hand.[81]

But this was atypical. Elsewhere in this study he maintains that Revelation's reference to Babylon must not be taken literally, but "in the figurative sense, as that World Power which at all times has been inimical to the Kingdom of God, to Christ and to His Church. . . ."[82] Also, the millennium is to be understood "symbolically," as befits the "peculiar character" of the Apocalypse."[83]

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)

Kuyper's compatriot and colleague in the renewal of the Dutch Reformed Church, Herman Bavinck, was less flamboyant and charismatic, but his monumental *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (*Reformed Dogmatics*) is a theological classic yet to leave its mark on the English-speaking world.[84]

His approach to the millennial question is sober and thorough. The key chapter's title, "Israel, the Millennium, and Christ's Return," is significant because amillennialists have often paid insufficient attention to the place of Israel in salvation history.[85] Only after a discussion of selected passages regarding Israel, and a detailed analysis of the phrase "all Israel" (Rom. 11:20), does he take up the question of an interim millennial age (i.e., the chiliast or premillennial position), the Book of Revelation, and the nature of Christ's return.

Bavinck's conclusion concerning "all Israel" is *not* that at the end of time the people of Israel "will be converted in mass. Nor is it the church of the Jews and Gentiles together. But it is the *plêrôma* that in the course of centuries will be brought in from Israel."[86] He treats at some length the rise of chiliasm and then gives a scriptural reply to it. He also takes up the question of the return of the Jews to Palestine, and notes that almost a century ago, there were Zionist political expectations for which "the New Testament furnishes not the slightest support."[87]

Although the postmillennial option is unmentioned, Bavinck is obviously not in sympathy with it, for "according to incontrovertible testimony of Scripture, the history of humankind . . . ends in general apostasy and an appalling final struggle of a coalition of satanic forces against God and his kingdom."[88] In *Our Reasonable Faith*, a later popular summary of his dogmatics, Bavinck simply offers a brief critique of the chiliasts whose "fundamental error . . . lies in a mistaken conception of the relation between the Old and New Testament." By positing two returns of Christ, "the comfort of the believers is remarkably modified."[89]

The Modern Era

Although Geerhardus Vos lived until 1949, the fact that he began teaching in 1893 leads me to classify him as a product of the nineteenth century rather than a modern theologian. His viewpoint, however, as well as that of Kuyper and Bavinck, continues dominant in Reformed-Presbyterian circles to the present. While eschatology became an "in" subject in continental Reformed (and Lutheran) theology on the continent between the two World Wars, the millennial question was only peripheral. The most significant book on eschatology by an American Presbyterian during the post-war period was William Childs Robinson's *Christ the Hope of Glory* (1945).[90] Robinson, the highly respected professor of historical theology at Columbia Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, represents the consensus view of Reformed theology in the twentieth century. Although written in a semi-popular style, Robinson clearly did his homework. He is familiar with the older Reformed writers on eschatology—from Calvin and Turretin to Dabney, Warfield, Bavinck, and Vos—as well as with such recent authors as Paul Althaus (the German Lutheran theologian who wrote "the" book on the subject for the German-speaking world)[91] and Karl Barth. Although he has skillfully distilled the latest scholarship, Robinson's outline of events to precede Christ's return is the traditional amillennial one.[92] He deals in a

particularly helpful way with the tension between two seemingly opposing eschatological events, viz., the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles, on the one hand, and a collective falling away from the faith (apostasy), on the other.[93]

Robinson's book may represent the majority Reformed millennial view until mid-century, but there have been premillennial mavericks throughout most of Reformed/Presbyterian history. An interesting early example is H.P. Scholte, an *Afscheiding* pastor in the Netherlands who founded the Pella, Iowa, Dutch immigrant community in 1847. Scholte was influenced by J.N. Darby, and espoused dispensationalism in his independent Pella church. (He never joined the Reformed Church.) Earl Wm. Kennedy has detailed how a more moderate premillennialism was a topic of considerable interest both in Pella and in Northwest Iowa Reformed churches during the latter half of the nineteenth century.[94]

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC), which was more strictly confessional and more Dutch, originally resisted the blandishments of their Reformed premillennial brethren in the Midwest.[95] But in the aftermath of World War I, the Reverend Harry Bultema published *Maranatha! Eene Studie over de Onvervulde Profetie*(1917). The following year B.K. Kuiper and his younger brother R.B. Kuiper began to make premillennial-type prophecies, and "By war's end apocalyptic premillenialism was the rage of Dutch-American conversations,"[96] particularly in the CRC. These ministers attacked both liberal Protestantism and Reformed colleagues who were apathetic toward prophecy.

Bultema and some of his colleagues had denominational difficulties because they were dispensational millenarians. Going beyond historic premillenarianism, he asserted that redeemed Jews had a destiny and role quite apart from the church and were to be God's chief instrument on earth for the evangelization of the world. Bultema also made the mistake of attacking some fundamental Kuyperian principles, an act tantamount to attacking motherhood.

The "Confessionalists" in the CRC launched a counterattack led by P.Y. De Jong (who wrote a 300-page book criticizing premillennialism), and Louis Berkhof[97] (the esteemed theology professor and eventual president of Calvin Seminary). As a result, the 1918 CRC General Synod investigated Bultema and directed his consistory to admonish him. James Bratt maintains that "the Synodical Committee acted so tactlessly that Bultema, most of his congregation, and scattered sympathizers left the denomination."[98]

This issue remained peripheral in the CRC until Calvin Seminary professor D.H. Kromminga followed the public airing of his premillennial views with the a major study, *Millennium in the Church. Studies in the History of Chiliasm* (1945).[99] This careful, 350- page volume is more than a historical survey. Kromminga explores the history of the question to substantiate his thesis that chiliasm (premillennialism) has not been simply a fringe movement during minor periods of church history. Nor does he hesitate to note the sectarian types of chiliasm which sometimes went "far afield and ended in baseless vagaries" and wild speculations.[100]

Nevertheless, he not only criticizes both the amillennial and postmillennial views and their underlying hermeneutic, but also argues for "covenantal millennialism." Thus, in contrast to Bultema and most of dispensational millennialism so popular in our day, Kromminga believes in "the one all-embracing Covenant of Grace."[101] He summarizes his position as follows:

> In justice to the millennial passage and its whole context the millennium must be conceded to be nothing else than *a distinct closing period* of human history following upon the destruction of the beast and the false prophet in the battle of Armageddon. It is an interruption in Satan's war against the Church and a suspension of his power to deceive.[102]

Kromminga's work caused a stir in CRC circles without evoking the hostility which characterized the Bultema case. Despite some criticism, Kromminga was not suspended from his position at the seminary. Nevertheless, two of his Calvin Seminary colleagues were to respond with studies supporting the amillennial view, viz., Martin Wyngaarden's *The Future of the Kingdom in Prophecy and Fulfillment* (1934),[103] and William Hendriksen's influential commentary, *More Than Conquerors* (1939).[104]

Prior to World War II, there had also been some premillennial stirrings in the Reformed Church in America (RCA). In 1925, John Bennink, became the minister of Unity Reformed Church in Muskegon, Michigan. He was soon in trouble over issues that included millennial views influenced by Harry Bultema. About the same time, the Reverend Albert Waalkes of Grand Rapids, like Bennink, questioned the biblical basis for infant baptism and espoused premillennial views. Waalkes was deposed by his classis in 1929, Bennink by his classis in 1932.[105] Their removal was not the result of a single issue, but their millenarianism was dispensational and thus rightly deemed to be inconsistent with the Reformed understanding of the covenant.

Not long after, the Reverend Gerrit Hospers of East Williamson, New York, was defending premillennialism. In 1935 he published a 52-page booklet entitled *The Principle of Spiritualization in Hermeneutics*. It was directed against Martin Wyngaarden's *The Future of the Kingdom in Prophecy and Fulfillment* and against Western Seminary's Albertus Pieters' defense of it in the RCA's weekly magazine, *The Leader* (September 5, 1939). Under the title, "The Spiritualization of Prophecy," Pieters wrote:

> The question whether the Old Testament prophecies concerning the people of God must be interpreted in their ordinary sense, as other Scriptures are interpreted, or can properly be applied to the Christian Church, is called the question of the spiritualization of prophecy. This is one of the major problems in biblical interpretation, and confronts everyone who makes a serious study of the Word of God. It is one of the chief keys to the difference of opinion between Premillenarians and the mass

> of Christian scholars. The former reject such spiritualization, the latter employ it; and as long as there is no agreement on this point the debate is interminable and fruitless.[106]

Objecting vehemently to the "spiritualization" approach, Hospers sought to refute Wyngaarden's argument point by point. He also sees in the amillennial position of Wyngaarden and Pieters "a modernistic principle" at work in their approach to eschatology, although he regards them both as quite orthodox.[107]

If Hospers made a tactical error, it was in attacking Albertus Pieters, one of the most able, revered, and influential professors in the history of Western Seminary. Pieters, however, was chiefly concerned with the increasing inroads of dispensationalism in the RCA brought about by popular books on this theme, by the influence of Christian radio stations, and above all by the growing popularity of the Scofield Bible which gave an air of authority to the dispensational understanding of Scripture. This moved Pieters to write two versions of a commentary on Revelation: *The Lamb, the Woman, and the Dragon* (1937) and *Studies in the Revelation of St. John* (1943);[108] and *The Seed of Abraham: A Biblical Study of Israel, the Church, and the Jew* (1950).[109] The latter does not engage in a direct polemic against anyone in particular, but Pieters is obviously thinking of dispensationalists in general and Zionists in particular. In this regard his words are still relevant:

> In conclusion, some will ask what we think of Zionism and of the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine. We reply that this is a biblical study, not a political forecast. No doubt God has His plans for this new development, as for the whole course of affairs in the world, but as students of prophecy it is our task to determine what He has revealed concerning such plans; and whether this new state becomes permanent or not, we are still sure that no such thing is to be found in the scriptures.[110]

Similar inroads in Presbyterian churches elicited similar responses from Presbyterian scholars. About the time of the CRC and RCA debates, a professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary, Oswald T. Allis, dealt with the question of the interpretation of prophecy in *Prophecy and the Church* (1945).[111] Thirty years later Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, an evangelical Anglican teaching at Westminster Seminary, published *Interpreting Prophecy,*[112] a similar critique of dispensational eschatology.

Probably the most widely read book of this sort, however, was by George Murray, a minister of the old United Presbyterian Church. His *Millennial Studies* (1948),[113] widely used in amillennial schools, has now been largely superseded by the late Anthony Hoekema's excellent eschatological study, *The Bible and the Future*.[114] Hoekema stands in the tradition of neo-Calvinists Kuyper and Bavinck, and the late G.C. Berkouwer. The latter's two-volume eschatology, *De Wederkomst van Christus* (1961 and 1963), reduced to one

volume in English (*The Return of Christ*) is still a tome of 453 pages.[115] Although Berkouwer's monumental work deserves more recognition than it has received, Hoekema's study has the advantage of compactness and more compatability with the American scene. Particularly valuable is Hoekema's lengthy critique of dispensational premillennialism, since this view virtually monopolizes the popular religious media.[116]

Conclusion

This historical survey has revealed a variety of Reformed interpretations of the millennial question. It challenges the frequent assumption that the amillennial view is "the" Reformed view, for although postmillennial and premillennial[117] Reformed theologians are in the minority, they can claim to stand within the Reformed tradition. Dispensational millennialism, however, falls outside that tradition because of its view of church and kingdom, and the place it assigns to the Jewish church beyond history. Also to be eschewed is the irresponsible speculation of people like Hal Lindsey.[118] One would think that such authors would self-destruct because their prophecies have often proved to be false,[119] but, in spite of that, they continue to attract large followings.[120]

As we approach the next millennium, the current "apoca-mania" will reach new heights, especially should there be another Mideast crisis. Recall, for example, how John F. Walvoord, a retired Dallas Seminary professor, capitalized on the Persian Gulf War in 1991 to sell 1.7 million copies of *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*.[121]

In the meantime, most Reformed scholars ignore the issue, dismiss it with disdain, or relegate it to a footnote in their dogmatics.[122] If this continues, the battle for the minds and hearts of countless Christian people will be lost by default. The church, whether mainline or conservative evangelical (as over against fundamentalist sectarian groups) must somehow compete with the popular religious media largely controlled by independent, flamboyant evangelists who frequently claim special insight into the future.[123]

One need not be a biblical scholar or theologian to be able to appreciate the fine, balanced study by Stanley Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (1992),[124] but the average church member, let alone fringe people mesmerized by the millennial question, will not read such books.

Thus, the CRC is to be commended for the timely publication of *The Day of Christ's Return: What the Bible Teaches, What You Need to Know,*[125] a semi-popular biblical study by Andrew Kuyvenhoven, pastor and former editor of *The Banner*. Such a book will not be able to counter sensational eschatological best-sellers, but it is an excellent resource for individuals or study groups seeking to deal with eschatology in some depth.[126]

Kuyvenhoven writes from an amillennial perspective, a view its adherents believe best represents the meaning of prophecy and the eschatalogical outlook of the entire New Testament. Nevertheless, as amillennialist Stanley Grenz points out, we can learn from each of the other views. The premillennialists

rightly remind us of the apocalyptic nature of the New Testament, a reminder in accord with the latest New Testament scholarship. Premillennialists, particularly dispensationalists, stress Israel's place in salvation history, an issue largely ignored by mainline Protestants (and Roman Catholics and the Orthodox) with the exception of Karl Barth and certain Dutch theologians. Premillennialists also keep reminding us that the end is near (whether or not in the year 2000), and that we should thus take seriously Jesus' exhortations to be ready and watchful (cf. Matt. 24:44; 25:13 and Mark 13:33, 35, 37).

Grenz also points to a virtue of the postmillennial view congenial to all Reformed Christians, viz., the conviction that "God is sovereign over history and is actively engaged in bringing his sovereign goal to pass." Moreover, postmillennialists also emphasize that in Christ, God has invited us and "commissioned us to participate in the advance of the divine reign."[127]

The virtue of amillennial realism is that it neither succumbs to the pessimism of the dispensationalists nor to the one-sided optimism of the postmillennialists. It must, however, avoid the indifference characteristic of some amillennial views.

Once the hysteria of the approaching millennium has passed, it will remain incumbent on Reformed/Presbyterian ministers and scholars to address the larger questions that eschatological interest has raised. At stake is not how and where the world will end, but how we are to live here and now between the times (see 1 Pet. 4:7-11). The millennial question is only a minor, albeit important, aspect of eschatology. The ultimate goal is the consummation of the reign (or kingdom) of God, a reign inaugurated by our Lord, whose consummation awaits the new heaven and the new earth.

In the meantime we work and pray for the coming of that reign, recognizing that it is not we but God who will eventually usher in the day when "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 14:15b).

ENDNOTES

[1] The word 'millennium' does not occur in Scripture. It refers to the references to a thousand years in Revelation 20:1-7. The reference to a thousand year period is found nowhere else in Scripture except for the figurative usage of the term in 2 Peter 3:8.

[2] This passage can be found in the *The Book of Confessions* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly of the UPCUSA, 1966), 5.075.

[3] The word "chiliasm," or "chiliasts" comes from the Greek for 1000, *chilioi*, and is preferred by German and Dutch theologians. Anglo-Saxons generally prefer the word "millennium" or "millenarians."

[4] H. Kraft, "Chiliasmus," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, dritte Aufgabe (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1957), 1652. Translation mine.

[5] These are all conservative theologians. Generally mainline theologians, whether Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, or Episcopalian, are not preoccupied with this question.

[6] Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992. A similar, earlier, and very useful study is *The Meaning of the Millennium*, a symposium edited by Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977).

[7] However, a Madagascar theologian, Jean De Dieu Rajaonarivony, has written an impressive doctoral dissertation at Calvin Seminary on Barth's eschatology with the significant title, "Transcendence and History in Karl Barth's Amillennial Theology."

[8] Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960. The same is true of his earlier, more lengthy treatment of eschatology, *Eternal Hope* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954). Here, too, there is no reference to Revelation 20:1-7, and typical of most modern theologians, Brunner refuses to get caught up in any kind of apocalyptic speculation. Toward the beginning of his last chapter on "The End of All Things: The Consummation" he writes: "There is nothing easier, and also nothing more unprofitable, than to sketch out a glorious Biblical finale such as has been done time and time again by strictly Biblicist theologians, with the result that we possess dozens or hundreds of such doctrinal schemes claiming to delineate the end of the world, and to follow precisely Holy Scripture, yet all mutually contradictory and evading the questions which a thinking man of to-day cannot fail to raise," p. 185. Otto Weber, the foremost German Reformed theologian of the twentieth century in his large *Foundations of Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, relegates the subject of chiliasm to a footnote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 672. Hendrikus Berkhof, one of the leading Dutch Reformed theologians of our time makes a single reference to the millennial kingdom and does not refer once to any of the verses in Revelation 20:1-7 in his *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, revised edition, 1986). However, in an earlier book, *Christ the Meaning of History* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1962) there is a fairly extensive discussion of Revelation 20:1-7, 153ff. More about this later.

[9] Stanley Grenz makes the interesting observation that Moltmann's theology, despite his early *Theology of Hope*, resembles premillennarianism in that it is basically pessimistic in its understanding of the relationship of the present to the future. Rather than being its fulfillment, the future contradicts the present. On the other hand, Grenz sees in liberation theology a "reassertion of the optimistic world view of the older postmillennialism," *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 192-3. In all other respects, however, there are fundamental differences between Moltmann and premillennialism and liberation theology and postmillennialism.

[10] The various millennial views are described briefly by Robert G. Clouse in the introduction to the volume he has edited: *The Meaning of the Millennium. Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977). A fuller treatment is given by Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). I am indebted to both of these volumes for much of my data. Clouse, a specialist in this field, is Professor of History at Indiana State University. He takes a neutral

position in this book whereas the late Anthony Hoekema, longtime Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Seminary, holds the amillennial view.

[11] I have given only the barest outline of the premillennial position. For more details see Hoekema, op. cit., 180-2. There are also variants within this position, as well as in all the millennial views, particularly the dispensationalist one. For example, according to Clouse, "Some premillennialists have taught that during the golden age dead believers will be resurrected with their glorified bodies to mingle freely with the rest of the inhabitants of the earth," *The Meaning of the Millennium*, 8.

[12] Earlier writers often did not make such a distinction, but it is now common. Cf. Clouse and Hoekema, op. cit.

[13] Clouse, op. cit., 12.

[14] For more details concerning the dispensational premillennial view, see Hoekema, op. cit., 186-193. In chapter 15 he gives a full-scale critique of this view. For an exposition and defense of it see the essay on dispensational premillennialism by Herman A. Hoyt in Clouse, op. cit.

[15] Clouse, op. cit., 9-10.

[16] There were some significant exceptions, however, in the eighteenth century, notably premillenarians J.H. Bengel, Isaac Newton, and Joseph Priestly.

[17] Clouse, op. cit., 11.

[18] Among his many publications see particularly *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956); *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); *Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); and his essay on "Historic Premillennialism" in the Clouse volume cited above.

[19] Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970.

[20] Santa Ana, CA: Vision Pub. House, 1973.

[21] On the apocalyptic background of millennialism see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze. Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 28ff.

[22] Augustine's position here, as elsewhere, was not that simple. Accordingly, some postmillennialists also appeal to Augustine. Loraine Boettner, for example, avers that "Among Postmillennialists should be mentioned first of all the great Augustine, whose eminently sound interpretation of Scripture set the standard for the Church for nearly a thousand years," *The Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 10, cited in Grenz, op. cit., 222, n. 12.

[23] This is the only allusion to Revelation 20:1-7 in the *Institutes*.

[24] T.F. Torrance, in *Kingdom and Church. A Study of the Theology of the Reformation* describes Luther's eschatology as one of faith, Bucer's as one of love, and Calvin's as one of hope (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1956). On Calvin's eschatology in general see Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of Last Things* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955). Cf. David Holwerda, "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin. Essays in Honor of John Bratt*, David E. Holwerd, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

[25] The title of Chapter IX of Book III. Lest this thought to be too other worldly, note that the following chapter is on "How We Must Use the Present Life and Its Helps."

[26] The Fuller Seminary doctoral dissertation by George Kroeze of the Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids is entitled "The Variety of Millennial Hopes in the English Reformation, 1560-1660." Calvin died in 1564. Kroeze points out that there is some confusion among scholars in this area, for some of them regard any kind of apocalyptic expectations as a form of millennialism, whereas a premillennial view always involves a literal thousand year reign of Christ with his saints on the earth prior to the final consummation.

[27] Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope. Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 42.

[28] For more details see Murray, ibid., 42-48.

[29] Kroeze, op. cit., 9-11. The Fifth Monarchy party believed that Christ's rule (monarchy) succeeding the four referred to in Daniel, was soon to be established, with the Jews converted and the millennium begun.

[30] The Savoy Declaration of 1658, the confession of the Independents, sounds very much like the postmillennial position, but Murray claims that John Owen, one of the Savoy divines "declined to identify this period of the Church's highest development with the millennium," op. cit. 53. However, the chapter on the church in this confession reads like this:

> We expect that in the later days that in the later days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the Kingdom of his dear Son broken, the Churches of Christ being inlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.

Samuel Rutherford, a staunch Presbyterian and lecturer at St. Andrews University held a similar view.

[31] Kroeze, op. cit., 296. In an earlier chapter Kroeze also maintains that a "modified Augustinianism," i.e., a form of amillenialism continued in England through the mid-seventeenth century, 206.

[32] It has been suggested, for example, that in Johannes Cocceius's (1603-1669) covenant or federal theology we have the foundations of dispensationalism. For with Cocceius the covenant is realized in a succession of historical steps culminating in the kingdom of God. "In this way Cocceius was able to introduce the ideas of the history of salvation and of millennialism into scholastic Reformed theology," R. Clouse, "Cocceius, J.," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J.D. Douglas, ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 238. John Bolt in a public lecture given at Calvin Seminary, November 12, 1998, notes in passing that there was "a general antipathy of Dutch neo-Calvinism [i.e., Kuyper and Bavinck] to Cocceius' dispensational-progressive view of history." "Perhaps, Why Not in America? Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Kuyper on the Millennial Promise of the New World," 9, n. 16.

[33] Reiner Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1998), III, 45. John Davenport, the founder of New Haven, was an exception. He believed that the first resurrection in Revelation 20:5 referred to a

literal resurrection of the saints who would reign with Christ for a thousand years after the return of Christ.

[34] Note that there is no reference to a second resurrection in Revelation 20. Yet this notion of two resurrections is crucial for premillennialism.

[35] From Mather's *Threefold Paradise*, cited in Smolenski, op. cit., 49.

[36] New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, ed. Stephen J. Stein who has written a very perceptive introduction even though he apparently concurs with those who find Edwards' interpretation neither "persuasive or intellectually respectable," 1.

[37] Smolenski, op, cit., 57.

[38] Stein, op. cit., 18.

[39] *Notes on the Apocalypse*, 134, cited in Stein, ibid.

[40] *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*, in *Works 4*, 353, cited in Stein, ibid., 26.

[41] Ibid., 26.

[42] Bolt, op. cit., 15-16. Later (on 17) Bolt quotes a fascinating passage from Edwards' *The Great Awakening*, Works 4, 358: "And if we may suppose that his glorious work of God shall begin in any part of America, I think, if we consider the circumstances of the settlement of New England, it must needs appear the most likely of all American colonies, to be the place whence this work shall properly take its rise."

[43] *A History of the Work of Redemption*, 480-5, cited in Smolenski, op. cit., 61.

[44] This ascription is cited by Grenz, op. cit., 56, but no source is given.

[45] Ibid. This type of millennial thinking persisted long after the Great Awakening and had some distinguished spokesmen. One was Yale president Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) who speculated that the millennium would begin about the year 2000 and "would be realized, not by miracles but gradually and through human efforts," Michael J. St. Clair, *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1992), 271.

[46] Grenz, op. cit., 59.

[47] Cited in the essay, "World Mission," by Herman Hamelink III in *Piety and Patriotism*, ed. James W. Van Hoeven (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 78.

[48] Ibid., cf. the essay "Theology" by Eugene Heideman in the same volume. He also quotes part of Livingston's famous sermon and describes in more detail Livingston's millennial vision, 97-8.

[49] New York: Scribners & Sons, 1888.

[50] Earl Wm. Kennedy, a Hodge specialist, suggests that Hodge's postmillennial optimism in part may be "a reflection of an overconfident age, a secular doctrine of progress (albeit with Christian roots), and his [Hodge's] own essentially sunny disposition," "From Pessimism to Optimism: Francis Turretin and Charles Hodge on 'The Last Things,'" in *Servant Gladly: Essays in Honor of John W. Beardslee III*, ed. Jack D. Klunder and Russell L. Gasero (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 105. However, the historical context is quite different for twentieth-century postmillennialists.

[51] See his full-scale study, *The Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958). Boettner is best known for *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

7th edn,, 1951). Boettner also contributes the chapter on postmillennialism in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert G. Clouse.

[52] See his *Revelation Twenty* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1955). Boettner's and Kik's views are examined briefly by Anthony Hoekema in *The Bible and the Future*, 175f.

[53] Norman Shepherd, "Postmillennialism," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), IV, 822-3. Cf. Hoekema, op. cit., 176-9.

[54] See *Christ's Victorious Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).

[55] James De Jong describes this as "a late twentieth century mutant," i.e., of postmillennialism, which "sees the substantial reintroduction of Old Testament standards as essential to this era," "Millennialism," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald McKim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 241. The principal advocates of this new school of thought are Rousas John Rushdoony, Gary North, and Greg Bahnsen. They believe that the calling of the church is to enforce obedience in society to biblical law. "The goal of reconstructionists is nothing less than the establishment of 'a Christian Republic where God's law rules,'" Grenz, op. cit., 82. The quoted phrase is from James B. Jordan. For an evaluation and critique of this movement see William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, editors, *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

[56] The papers given at this symposium were bound together with the title *Charles Hodge Revisited. A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work.*

[57] "Charles Hodge as an Expositor of the Spiritual Life," 36-7.

[58] I must concede that I have not examined the more than 140 articles he published in the *Biblical Repertory* and *Princeton Review*.

[59] *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965 reprint) III, 790.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 772.

[62] Kennedy describes Hodge's Antichrist as "something of a paper tiger," i.e., unlike many of his predecessors he does not identify Antichrist with the Roman pontiff, the papacy, or any person in particular. His treatment of the doctrine, Kennedy maintains, "is academic and not particularly vivid," 111 and 128, n. 37.

[63] Ibid., 858-9.

[64] Ibid., 861, n. 1.

[65] Ibid., 864.

[66] This essay is reprinted in Warfield's collected works in the volume *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1929), 643.

[67] Ibid., 646.

[68] Ibid., 663.

[69] Hodge "teaches, as a subordinate motif, that Christ could come soon, that the church should be ready, and that prosecution of the missionary task will help to 'prepare the way of the Lord,'" Kennedy, op. cit., 113.

[70] On this see James H. Morehead, "Engineering the Millennium: Kingdom Building in American Protestantism, 1880-1910," in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Supplementary Issue, No. 3 (1994). "The secular fruits of the millennium,

previously regarded as byproducts of the kingdom, were increasingly sought [during this period] as objects worthy of pursuit in their own right," 105.

[71] Reported in Grenz, op. cit., 222, n. 8.

[72] Morton Smith's Foreword to the 1972 reprinting of Dabney's *Lectures in Systematic Theology* records the extravagent claim of Dabney's biographer T.C. Johnson that Dabney occupied "the first place among the theological thinkers and writers of his century" A more sober estimate is given by Smith: "Dabney is considered the single most influential person in the Southern Presbyterian Church from 1865 to 1895" (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), Foreword.

[73] Ibid., 837.

[74] Ibid., 839.

[75] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans reprint 1952. It was first published in 1930. Grenz describes this as "the classic amillennial study of Paul," op. cit., 234.

[76] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951.

[77] Op. cit., 134-5.

[78] "Perhaps. Why Not in America?: Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Kuyper on the Millennial Promise of the New World." This lecture will be incorporated into a forthcoming book by John Bolt, *A Free Church, a Holy Nation. Abraham Kuyper's "American" Public Theology.*

[79] From a transcription of this address in *The Grand Rapids Herald,* October 29, 1898, cited in Bolt, ibid., 2.

[80] *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935). According to John Bolt, the textual index of Kuyper's works has approximately 1,100 reference to Revelation in contrast to only 600 to Romans, op. cit., 20.

[81] Ibid., 109. Cited in Bolt, op. cit., 27.

[82] Ibid., 140; Bolt, 24.

[83] Ibid., 276-7, 271; Bolt, 26.

[84] Published originally in four volumes in 1895-1901, only the second volume, *The Doctrine of God,* was translated into English. In 1994, however, a Dutch Reformed Translation Society was organized and their first major project is the translation (by John Vriend) and publication of the complete *Dogmatiek.* A partial volume, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next,* ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker) was published in 1996. The second volume, on the doctrine of creation, is scheduled for publication in early 1999.

[85] A notable exception is Karl Barth. See especially his *Church Dogmatics* II, 2, *The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 195-305. Dutch theologians have also shown a keen interest in this subject, e.g., G.C. Berkouwer, Hendrikus Berkhof, and Kornelis Miskotte. The only confession I know with a special section on Israel is the Dutch Reformed Church's (Hervormede Kerk) *Foundations and Perspectives of Confession* (1946. Translated and published by New Brunswick Seminary in 1955). Article 3 is on "The Election of Israel."

[86] *The Last Things,* 106.

[87] Ibid., 100.

[88] Ibid., 121.

[89] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956, 560-1. The original version was published in 1909 with the quite different title *Magnalia Dei.*
[90] Subtitle: *Christological Eschatology.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945, 2nd edn., 1947).
[91] *Die Letzten Dinge*, Gütersloh, 9th edn. 1964; 1st edn., 1949.
[92] Op. cit., 195.
[93] Ibid., 241f.
[94] "Prairie Premillennialism: Dutch Calvinist Chiliasm in Iowa 1847-1900, or the Long Shadow of Hendrik Pieter Scholte," *Reformed Review* 46/2 (Winter, 1992), 156f.
[95] According to Kennedy, in contrast to the early Christian Reformed settlers in Iowa, the Reformed "in Sioux County and in the Midwest in general (in their weekly Dutch language newspaper *De Hope*) were much more open to the whole subject, partly because of their being more in tune with their American evangelical surroundings," ibid., 159.
[96] I am indebted for msot of this information about premillennialism in the Christian Reformed Church to thte study of James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America. A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 94f.
[97] Berkhof is best known for his standard text of conservative Reformed doctrine, *Systematic Theology*, which is still in print (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941; fourth rev. edn., 1949); and his *Summary of Reformed Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938/1975).
[98] Op. cit., 98.
[99] Published by Eerdmans.
[100] Ibid., 283.
[101] Ibid., The Foreword.
[102] Ibid., 348.
[103] Originally published by Zondervan; reprinted by Baker in 1955.
[104] Second edition in 1940; reprinted by Tyndale Press in 1962. Cf. his smaller studies, *Israel and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), and *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974).
[105] I am indebted for the details of these cases to an article by Thomas Boslooper, "Grace and Glory Days," in *Origins* IX, 1 (1991), 25ff. This journal is the historical magazine of Calvin College and Seminary Archives.
[106] Quoted in the Foreword of Hospers' booklet which was privately published.
[107] Ibid., 53.
[108] Both published by Eerdmans.
[109] Also published by Eerdmans. Privately reprinted in 1978. Pieters' influence was not so great outside of the Reformed Church, but his scholarship was eventually recognized in wider circles. This book, for example, is an expansion of the T.V. Moore lectures given at San Francisco Seminary.
[110] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950, 148.
[111] Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.
[112] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.

[113] Published by Baker. Another Presbyterian study of millennialism from about the same time is *The Basis of Millennial Faith* by Floyd E. Hamilton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942).

[114] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979/1984. Hoekema is also the representative for the amillennial position in the symposium edited by Robert Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium. Four Views.*

[115] Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

[116] Some significant shifts are taking place in dispensationalism, e.g., the narrowing of seven dispensations (as in the Scofield Bible) to three. Moreover, dispensationalism has some able defenders. Before dismissing it too quickly one should examine the impressive symposium by ten dispensationalist scholars in *Dispensationalism: Israel and the Church. The Search for a Definition*, Craig A Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, edd. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). There are ten contributors and also responses from three non-dispensationalists, including a Reformed scholar, Willem Van Gemeren. The book ends with a plea by the editors to engage in continuing dialogue about eschatological questions rather than engage in the nasty polemics which so often characterized earlier debates.

[117] Earlier I mentioned several contemporary Presbyterian postmillennial theologians. A prominent premillennial pastor-theologian is James Montgomery Boice, pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and a prolific author. See his *The Last and Future World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

[118] For a critique of Lindsey's approach see C. Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* (St. Catherines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978/81). The author is of Dutch origins and is now a Canadian. His Preface points out what prompted him to write this book:

> When Hal Lindsey appeared on television in the Netherlands, it became clear that even sober Calvinists welcomed his dispensationalism with open arms. His predictions about the future were accepted and believed. Clearly the Christians there were defenseless when confronted with his misleading ideas.

[119] Hal Lindsey, for example, in 1981 claimed that the 1980s mark the "countdown to Armageddon." Reported by George Cornell in a syndicated column which appeared in *The Holland Sentinel*, May 1, 1981.

[120] For a history of various predictions concerning the Antichrist see E.R. Chamberlain, *Antichrist and the Millennium* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975. Chamberlian is an Englishman. A more recent book of a similar nature is by Robert Fuller, *Naming the Antichrist: The History of an American Obsession* (1995).

[121] This was the fastest selling book in Zondervan's history and spent five weeks atop the *New York Times* best-seller list. Several years ago it was remaindered.

[122] Granted, the recent one-volume systematic theologies by Presbyterian theologians are relatively brief, but there is no mention of the millennium or reference to Revelation 20:1-7 in any of the following: John H. Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993); Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, Revised Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). The same is true of the earlier—and considerably larger systematic theology by Hendrikus Berkhof,

Christian Faith, Revised (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); although Berkhof treats Revelation 20:1-7 and the millennial kingdom at some length in his earlier *Christ the Meaning of History* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1962), 153ff. A notable exception in this regard is the neo-Kuyperian theology by the late Gordon Spykman of Calvin College, *Reformation Theology. A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). Part V, chapter II is on "The Millennium." Because of the negative connotation of the term "amillennium," i.e., non-millennium, Spykman uses a new term, "*pro*millennialism" (accent mine), 540.

Donald Bloesch, an evangelical theologian in the Reformed tradition, discusses the pros and cons of each millennial view at some length in Volume 2 of his *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979). He is critical of amillennialism because it tends toward church imperialism, on the one hand, and an undue pessimism concerning the course of world history, on the other. He is also critical of postmillennialism on several counts and eventually describes his own view as "a postmillennialism within the framework of a modified amillennialism," 199.

[123] Robert Schuller is an exception, but he does not help the cause because he avoids such issues and does not deal with the texts that relate to the end times.

[124] This book has been cited several times above.

[125] Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1999.

[126] Another possibility—and more may be forthcoming during this year—is the late William Barclay's *At the Last Trumpet* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox,1998).

[127] Grenz, op. cit., 213.

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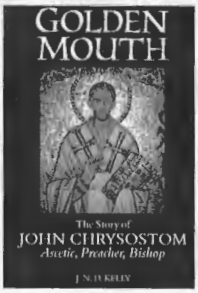

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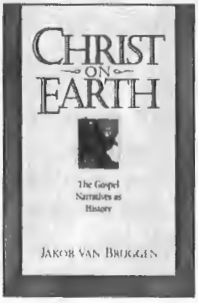

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